

SPECIFICATION

ALERT MUTING METHOD THROUGH INDIRECT CONTACT FOR PORTABLE DEVICES

5

Cross-Reference to Related Applications

Not Applicable

Statement Regarding Federally Sponsored Research or 10 Development

Not Applicable

Reference to Sequence Listing, a Table, or a Computer Pgm Listing CD Appendix

15 Not Applicable

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

20 The invention generally relates to a method for
muting an alerting portable device such as a ringing cell
phone or alarming PDA. Specifically where muting is
activated in a means not requiring direct contact with
the keys of the device.

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DESCRIPTION OF THE RELATED ART

Portable communication devices, such as cellular
telephones, actively receive calls while the user in a
wide range of situations. Users often have the ringers
30 set on high to insure that they will hear the ringer. In
fact, United States Patent No. 6,246,761 is to help
insure that the ringer is heard. Once a user has heard
the ringer, further ringing is an annoyance to the
receiver and surrounding people. While retrieving the

phone from it's storage place, the ringing continues and often sounds louder as it is retrieved from a pocket or purse. What the user needs is an effective way to silence the ring until they can retrieve the phone from its storage place.

Method of muting a by an impulse made indirectly or directly to the device. An impulse such as tapping or patting the device, even if in a pocket or handbag would stop the audible alert. In a portable telephone, the impulse could be detected either by the microphone element already in the phone, or an added accelerometer type sensor.

United States Patent Application 20020028674 - Describes a politeness zone that will silence ringers on cellular phones. This shows that people are concerned with controlling the ringing in different situations.

United States Patent 6,463,278 - Describes automatic mode changing based upon time/calendar, attached peripherals, light conditions. None of these involve the user in the ring silencing process.

United States Patent 6,456,696 - Describes a method for deactivating a call indicator via a keypad or a menu. This describes various schemes for handling and screening calls but with muting the ringer with a key or menu on the phone, so the user must still gain full access to the phone to activate the ringer mute.

United States Patent 6,408,187 - Describes determining the behavior of a communications device based upon environmental conditions. The detected environmental conditions set the state of the phone. They are not used for user interaction with the phone in the process of receiving calls.

United States Patent 6,400,814 - Describes a ringer silencer system, used for call screening. This provides for silencing the ring with the keys on the keypad and also for using the keys to direct the call or caller.

5 The user still has to gain access to the phone to access the silencing feature.

United States Patent 6,397,085 - Describes a key click volume control. This is based upon the state of the phones interaction within a vehicle mount.

10 United States Patent 6,347,133 - Describes using timer control for varying the number of rings and ringer volume. The user can program and select which of various ring settings to use with keys. There is no user interaction as a call is being received affecting the
15 ringing.

United States Patent 6,330,457 - Describes sensing that a user is holding the hand held phone with temperature, pressure, fingerprint or scanning beam. All of these require the user to come in direct contact with
20 the phone.

United States Patent 6,252,516 - Describes a sequential ringing system from silent to audible, and changing to fully audible alert when it is coupled to an accessory, (such as a power supply). There is no user
25 interaction with the phone at all.

United States Patent 6,246,761 - Describes a ringer system designed to insure that it will be heard. This senses the ambient noise surrounding the phone in a way to insure that the user will be able to hear the
30 phone. There is no user interaction in this system to further affect the ringing volume of an incoming call. Is does provide an example of sensing the environment beyond direct contact with the phone.

United States Patent 6,240,176 - Describes a silent ringer. This is a vibrator to alert the user. This also demonstrated the concern for a system that minimizes the unexpected sounds from portable communications devices.

5 United States Patent 6,018,671 - Describes a answering selection similar to putting the caller on hold with a message that the call will be answered shortly. This has the alert system already silent and provides one scheme for dealing with the call after the user is aware
10 that a call is being received and the user has gained access to the phone.

United States Patent 6,002,763 - Describes a ringing mute system which is activated while a user is preparing (dialing) for a call they are initiating. This
15 does not deal with silencing an ring for an incoming call in other situations based upon a users actions after the incoming call alert has started.

United States Patent 5,930,351 - Describes a remote control for a telephone ringer. This is an in line device
20 for wired telephones.

United States Patent 5,812,648 - Describes a ringing system that can be deactivated for a time, with remote control. It also provides for a caller or caller ID to override the deactivated ringer. The user does not
25 have control for an individual call.

United States Patent 5,687,227 - Describes allowing the user to record ringing signals. This permits distinctive ringing signals. Still does not provide for muting the alert.

30 United States Patent 5,642,413 - Describes selectable alert modes, with a switch for enabling a vibration mode of call annunciation. In this case the

selection is made with direct contact with a switch on the phone.

United States Patent 5,604,797 - Describes a gate system for silencing a ringer for a time. The silencing
5 system is set by the user for a time, and allows for a caller to override the muting.

U.S. Pat. No. 5,317,632 to Ellison, provide a means for silencing a ringer for a user-determined time period during which a user does not wish to be disturbed. This
10 is just a timer controlled switch system.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

A cell phone or personal digital assistant (PDA) in
15 a pocket, handbag or briefcase is not easily accessible to press the key required to silence the ringer. Once the user is aware that they need to gain access to the device to determine how to respond to the alert the actual audible annunciation is no longer needed. Yet the
20 user can not silence it. Additionally, the act of removing the device from the pocket or bag usually means that those around get to hear the alert even louder as it is removed. The continued sounding of the alert is often an annoyance to those around the user and an
25 embarrassment to the user.

The present invention allows the user to acknowledge the annunciation through indirect contact.

Such as when the phone or PDA is in the users pocket, simple patting the phone through the clothing
30 would stop the alert, then they can remove device from their pocket while it is silent.

When the alerting device is in a handbag, the act of jostling, or poking at the handbag would stop the alert.

When the device is in a brief case, the act of thumping on the case would stop the alert.

There may be times when the device is already in a moving environment. To avoid inadvertent silencing, the environment would be measured. Once the alert has been
5 activated, a user-initiated change in the previously measured environment would then be detectable. So a device being jostled in a handbag, as a user is walking, would not be silenced until some significantly different
10 motion is detected, it may be either the stopping of the jostling because the user is about to retrieve the phone from the bag, or an additional poke at the handbag, or some other signal processing analysis of the sensor.

15 **BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SEVERAL VIEWS OF THE DRAWING**

Figure 1 shows a device in a typical computer bag;

Figure 2 shows a device in a handbag;

Figure 3 shows a device in a pocket;

20 Figure 4 shows a device hanging from a belt;

Figure 5 shows an impact being applied to a device;

Figure 6 shows the likely predominant axis of sensitivity;

Figure 7 shows a ringer control system augmented
25 with additional accelerometer input control;

Figure 8 shows a microphone input circuit used both as a microphone and for ringer control, and

Figure 9 shows a generalized sensor processing scheme including taking environmental reference level

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

While in this detailed description the devices discussed include portable telephones to simplify the illustration of the invention. It is to be understood that this applies to any device that would need to signal the user.

Devices such as cell phones and PDAs are kept with the user. Often while they are with the user they are not actually held in their hands with immediate access to the controls of the device. When a phone 2 carried in a computer style bag 1 begins to ring (Fig. 1), it is often muffled while it is in the bag, to silence the ringer, the user must open the bag, often with the tearing sound of hook loop fastener, remove the phone, and now the ringing sound is louder. It must then be handled to gain access to the controls to silence the ring. Similarly if the phone 4 was in a handbag 4 (Fig. 2), or the phone 6 was in the pocket of their clothing 5 (Fig. 3). Belt clip devices 7 for a phone 8 (Fig. 4) greatly improve the speed at which the user can gain access to the ringer silencer, but still explicit handling to activate the specific control on the phone is required.

A simple action of a hand 10 pat against the phone 9 indirectly or directly could activate the ringer muting within the phone. The hand pat (slap, smack) on the phone (Fig. 5) can be detected through the material or even in the way the phone is intentionally jostled within the a handbag or briefcase. Given the generally flat rectangular form factor of devices, there is a major axis perpendicular to the largest face 12 (Fig. 6) and two

minor axis perpendicular to the smaller area faces 11,13. Because of how the phone would be residing in a pocket or handbag, it is likely that the axis perpendicular to face 12 should be the most sensitive for muting the ringer.

5 An Accelerometer 14 (Fig. 7) could be added to the device oriented in this manner to optimize sensitivity. This does not preclude in the scope of this invention the use a multiplicity of sensors. The accelerometer 14 signal would be subjected to processing 15. The
10 processing would interact with the actual Ringer Control 17 signaled by the Communication Device 16 to disable the Audible Ringer 18 and, according to the ringer control options affect the operation of the Silent Ringer 19, possibly enabling it as an alternate to the audible
15 ringer, or disabling both.

Another way to detect the users indirect contact with the phone is to use a microphone already built into the phone. Many PDA devices now also include microphone for recording so this can be applied to them too. When a
20 Microphone 20 (Fig. 8) is in a device there is likely Input Signal Conditioning Circuitry 21 in place to feed typical Communications Circuitry 25. A signal from the microphone or conditioning circuit is fed to a Processor 22 to detect the users manual signal against the phone.
25 The processing signals the Ringer Control 23 to shut down the Audible Ringer 24 which would optionally affect the Silent Ringer too. The ringer control also signals the processing so that the processor might be able to selectively reject signals sensed by the microphone
30 associated with the audible ringer.

The processing circuit (Fig. 9) takes the Sensor input 27 gets some Signal Processing 28, an input from the Phone Control Ringer Circuit 29 and indicate to the

processing when to filter out signals associated with the ringer, audible and or silent. The ringer control circuit may also control a Signal Director 30. When the ringer is Inactive, the processed signal value is being Stored
5 31 as a representation of the general environment around the phone. When the ringer is Active the processed signal is directed to be Compared 32 to the Stored value to detect the user initiated ringer deactivation. When the comparison succeeds, an output 33 goes to the ringer
10 control. By processing the signal from the sensor before ringing is initiated the detection of user action can be differentiated from the general environment around the phone. So even if the phone is in a handbag being carried, the jostling associated with that can be
15 differentiated from user action after the ringing starts.

Once the user action has been detected, the device action may have selected from a number of options. In addition or alternative to silencing the alert, selections may include, terminating the call, initiating
20 a preprogrammed response, or delaying when the alert will sound again.

The device may also be designed to detect a pattern of user interaction, such as multiple pats, or a series of pats in specific rhythms to initiate a range of
25 programmed actions. For example one pat might terminate the audible ringing, and a double pat might immediately transfer the call to voice mail.

Another application of a detected pattern of user interaction might be to initiate calls or other functions
30 within the device. A user set pattern could be used to

call home, or a pattern like the Morse Code SOS to call an emergency number. A pattern might also initiate some other function within the device such as a pause function on a device playing music.